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SOURCE La Bulgarie Libre

TRIALS OF DANUBE-BLACK SEA CANAL PROJECT DIRECTORS

Acts of sabotage have taken place on the Danube-Black Sea Canal project. On 9 August, the Bucharest newspaper Scanteia published the names of seven saboteurs and diversionaries who were accused of having compromised the work of construction on the canal. Among the accused were the chief of the production section in the General Directorate of the Danube-Black Sea Canal, the chief of the planning section, the chief of the mechanical section, two engineers, and the former military prosecutor of the Military Court of Timisoara. It is essential to understand the reason for the great concern shown by the Rumanian Communist authorities.

The construction work on the canal started in May 1949, as a direct result of heavy political pressure. The plans called for connecting the village of Navodari on the Black Sea with Cernavoda, a port on the Danube. A large labor force was assembled, composed almost entirely of political prisoners, and was placed at the disposal of the head of each labor camp. All camps were under the direction of the canal labor headquarters under Engineer Gheorghe Hossu. In 1951, Hossu left the canal headquarters, having been appointed Minister of Construction and the Construction Materials Industry.

Almost from the beginning, the work on the canal suffered because of the lack of machines, specialists, and cement, although the last item was being produced in large quantities for shipment to the USSR. Consequently, only 1,800 meters of the canal were constructed during the first year of work, with 75 kilometers yet to be built.

In 1950, the work made some progress due to a lessening of difficulties, improved modern techniques, and increased labor force. However, this progress was still extremely slow. During 1951 - 1952, several metallurgical shops were established in Media. These shops did not limit their production to equipment for the canal; they also produced automobiles, trucks, armored trucks, and tanks.

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According to one set of statistics, 30,000-35,000 workers are now employed on the canal. Of these, 25,000-30,000 are political prisoners. However, other sources state that 150,000-200,000 workers are employed, including 60,000-80,000 political prisoners. In all probability, the first set of figures is more accurate.

Propaganda is constantly being disseminated to induce free laborers to come to the canal area. Every means of propaganda is employed, including expositions, graphs, photos, motion pictures, billboards, and many others, but the response is meager. Special barracks were constructed for political prisoners, who are kept under guard.

Technicians were not selected because of knowledge or competence but rather from among those representing the least political and security risks. This accounts for the slow progress to date, and is not due, as is often explained, to the lack of labor force or inefficiency of equipment.

At present, the personal position of the new general director of the canal works is a very delicate one, since he has had several "difficulties" with the Politburo, following the recent purge at the canal. As was announced in all Bucharest papers, the trial of the directors accused of sabotaging the canal work commenced on 29 August. The Rumanian radio stated that the opening of the trial was received with much satisfaction by all canal workers, who demanded that the trial be held at the "place where the crime had been committed." As is usual in such trials, the accused men confessed to all acts with which they were charged.

All former leaders admitted that they had "sabotaged the construction of the canal and exploited the national economy and the present regime."

The punishment was the standard death sentence.

The spectacular trial shows the importance which the Communists attribute to this gigantic canal work, despite the hundreds of lives lost in the process.

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